

War Still Divides Vietnamese Families

By RICK PLUMLEE
Staff Writer

An and Hanh Le had to leave behind their six children, including a year-old daughter, when they fled Vietnam nearly three years ago.

The Ve Tran family has five children with them in Wichita, but four more, all of grade-school age, remain in Vietnam.

The two families are among about 15 refugee Vietnamese families living in Wichita who have at least one immediate family member in Vietnam, according to Bich Dao, coordinator of Indochinese refugees for the Catholic Diocese of Wichita.

"It is very painful not to be with your family," said Dao, whose parents remain in Vietnam.

Sunday, three years to the day after the fall of Saigon, several hundred Vietnamese met with Rep. Dan

Glickman, D-Kan., at the Normar theater to discuss family reunification.

"I RECOGNIZE that your primary personal concern is with reuniting families which the tragedy of the war and the rush to seek freedom in all too many cases tore apart," Glickman told the gathering.

Glickman said a short-term program is under way to admit 12,000 Indochinese refugees, about half of whom would be Vietnamese, to the United States. There are about 140,000 Vietnamese refugees in the U.S. and approximately 1,300 in Wichita.

The Carter administration also has proposed to continue the policy of admitting 25,000 Indochinese refugees annually to the U.S., Glickman said.

The first-term congressman encouraged the Vietnamese to seek resident alien status. A resident alien can request entrance visas for spouses

and minor children, he said.

WHILE DAO noted that the U.S. bureaucratic process is slow, he said he knows that the real stumbling block is the Vietnam government.

"The communists promise everything," he said, "but they do nothing. They do not let our families out."

The U.S. doesn't have diplomatic relations with Vietnam and is reluctant to work through a third country to seek the release of families of refugees, Glickman said.

"The reason for that reluctance is caution," he said. "We don't want to draw attention to those people when the repercussions in terms of government reprisals are not known."

The fact is that even if our government issues an exit visa, there is no guarantee that an exit visa from the other nation will be granted."

GETTING OUT of Vietnam is not easy for the refugees.



Non-communist countries near Vietnam will not accept Vietnamese refugees unless they can prove that they will be accepted by another country, such as the U.S., said the Rev. Robert Larson, director of Catholic Charities in Wichita, which sponsors 70 percent of the refugees in Wichita.

Jungle trails and precarious boat rides are the refugees' only means of escape, Larson said.

About 12,000 have escaped Vietnam in the last year, Larson said, but it is

estimated that many more have drowned.

"They overload 15- to 20-foot boats with 40 or 50 people," said Larson, "and then capsize in the ocean."

Dao said he was neither encouraged nor discouraged by Glickman's remarks.

"We will see," he said.

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